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P I E T Y

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P R I N C I P L E

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V I R T U E

By THOMAS NEWMAN

Ὡς γὰρ ἡ εὐσεβεία μήτηρ των ἀρετῶν ἀνεφάνη, ἔπειθ' ἡ πάσης
κακίας ἡγέμων ἢ τῆς εὐσεβείας ἀποπήϊστος.

Hierocles in Carm. Pythag.



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T H E
P R E F A C E

P I E T Y, or a regard to Almighty God, hath been ever allowed by the thinking Part of Mankind, not only eminently serviceable to the peace and happiness of Society, but to be necessary thereto. *This hath been a standing Argument for the maintaining and promoting it by all proper means ; and for my own part I am willing this should be determined by Experience and Observation. Amongst many testimonies universally obvious, I would only desire the Reader to attend to one.*

It is well known, an Oath is a most considerable Band and Support of Society : For --- by this the most important Processes in Courts of Judicature are governed ; matters of fact influencing Life and Estate are very frequently determined ; the most Faithful Judge or Magistrate is in many cases obliged to take his Direction for proceeding to a definitive Sentence from thence, be the affair before him of ever such consequence. This also is the solemn security a Government takes of its Subjects ; and whatever ground there be for the suspecting the disaffection of any particular person, The taking an Oath to be true, loyal, and faithful to the Prince is satisfactory. A plain acknow-

ledgment this, That Government hath not been able to find out any thing more strong and effectual for its own security: as indeed nothing can be thought of more solemn and awful in its own nature. * Of how great consequence must it then be to Society by all practicable and proper methods to secure the Reverence of an Oath, upon which what is Dear and Valuable to Mankind so much depends? But alas! The force and moment allowed to an Oath inevitably exposes us to very great injuries and sufferings in what is nearest to us. Were we to enquire into the causes hereof, we should probably be referred to the Multitude of Oaths that are administred; to the Forms of many which are said to be such that no one doth or can keep them; to the trifling superficial manner in which they are tendred, or to the want of an adequate penalty annexed to Perjury. It may be some or all of these have a considerable influence upon their being taken and kept too as very Forms and Ceremonies: and from undoubted reports made from Courts of Judicature, there are Multitudes, we have reason to believe, hardy enough to call Almighty God to witness to their knowledge of things which they are absolutely ignorant of; or which they know to be the Reverse to their Testimony: at the same time no way hesitating at the solemn imprecation of the Divine Vengeance upon themselves for the same. This I confess hath long led me to resolve the loss of that Reverence due to an Oath mainly into another cause: namely, into a general loss of all Reverence and Regard to a Supreme Being, contracted and promoted more especially

* Nullum enim vinculum ad adstringendam fidem iurando majores arctius esse voluerunt. Cic. de Off. l. 3.

specially by a customary prophanation of his Name, and invocation of his Vengeance.

When Oaths, or Appeals to Almighty God, are so familiar, and make up so great a part of ordinary Conversation, the Nature and Use of them must of course be lost : and when Creatures in their frolick and mirth can many times in an hour call for Divine Damnation upon themselves, what becomes of the Sanction of an Oath as a Civil Security? How is it likely that it should be regarded according to its design as the security to a Government, the means of preserving Property, of coming at Truth, and administering Justice, whilst it is prostituted to the meanest services, defecrated and rendred contemptible by common use? Can ever that be a sacred thing, or be a Bond in any special cases with any, who make it the Common Seal to every thing, be it ever so mean and trivial ; be it a Tale, a Jest, or a premeditated Lye? Or can that be an effectual engagement to Truth or Fidelity, to which purposes an Oath is instituted by Civil Authority, that is pledg'd upon all occasions, and given to back every Imperinency? Methinks Persons of very ordinary Penetration must be able to determine this matter, and by the Help of Common Sense alone may satisfy themselves, that customary and rash Swearing must evidently destroy all the Ends of an Oath solemnly tendered. An Heathen Orator joined " the Religion of an Oath and the Fear of God " together. They who can continually summon their Maker to be a Witness to their dissolute Non-sense, to their stormy Rage, or their most deliberate Lies,*

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* Cic. pro Fonteio.

can have no inward sense of the Being they invoke. And since the obligation of an Oath with respect to Conscience depends absolutely on the sense of and regard to a Divine Being, to whom it is a solemn appeal as a Witness of what we say, and an Invocation of his Vengeance in case of Falseness, how should they who make no Conscience of swearing Rashly and Vainly make any of swearing Falsely? How should they who call perpetually for Damnation and the Curse of God in their merri-ments, have any apprehension of it sufficient to secure Truth from them, when any mischief is to be avoided, or any advantage is to be gained by Falseness?

From hence, were it not in a manner putting a stop to All proceedings in our Courts of Judicature from the horrid Prevalency of this Unnatural, Inexcusable Habit, I should think it a very reasonable proposal, " That every Common Swearer " be legally INCAPACITATED for giving Testimony in any cause. " But since this cannot be, I humbly think from the vast influence that an Oath is allowed to have upon the peace and safety of Mankind as a Civil Act, and from the very easy transition from Common Swearing to False Swearing, that what is now deemed Wilful Perjury is most worthy of Death: Such a penalty affixed thereto is but a reasonable security for our Properties, Reputation, Liberty, and Lives from that quarter; and I humbly think merits the consideration of the Legislature.

What hath been suggested I think abundantly manifests, how necessary Piety is to the peace and welfare of Human Society. And by the way, how impertinent doth that excuse for the Common Swearers from hence appear, " They mean no-
" thing

“ thing by it.” Not to say, This is frequently false in fact : for very often by their ordinary appeals to God they design to deceive others, and by their terrible Curses they really desire the Destruction of their Fellow-creatures : But not to insist upon this, nor upon the intrinsick evil of the thing ; I would ask, supposing they do mean nothing thereby, yet are not the natural effects of this un-meaning practice something ? Hath it not in the highest degree an influence upon the Habit of the mind as to Truth and Falshood themselves, and as to the most powerful securities we have for the engaging to the One, and the preserving from the Other ? Is it not a kind of Habitual Perjury ? Are such likely to be any way attentive to what an Oath is, upon any solemn occasion, when this very plea acknowledges that they wanton with it ? Or can their want of intention, or absolute carelesness of mind be an Apology for those mischiefs it is the cause of ? It naturally and speedily destroys the Integrity of the mind ; That is of course laid waste ; and it is itself a preparation for Deliberate Perjury in any instance. And shall these actual consequences be overlooked or put up with under the plea of their not Intending any thing ; when these effects are the same, whether they mean any thing or not ? We shall only further subjoin on this head a passage of the TRULY Reverend Archbishop Tillotson. “ I speak it knowingly” saith he [and so may any in our day] “ A man can hardly pass the streets without having his Ears
“ grated and pierced with such horrid and blasphemous Oaths and Curses as were enough,
“ were we guilty of no other Sin, to sink a Nation. And this not only from the Tribe that
“ wear Liveries, but from those who go before
a 2 “ them,

“ them, and should give better Examples,
 “ Is it not then high time the Laws should pro-
 “ vide by the most prudent and effectual means
 “ to curb those bold and insolent Defiers of Heaven;
 “ who take a pride in being Monsters, and boast
 “ themselves in the Follies and Deformities of Hu-
 “ man Nature?”

The following Discourse sufficiently intimates the reason of its publication, viz. The unreasonable and pernicious separation of those things in Scheme and Practice, which the Author of our Religion hath joined together; from whence Christianity in general hath been sadly disgraced, and the end of it, the Reformation of Mankind, hath been manifestly frustrated. ---- Since the most exalted and perfect Virtue is taught, urged, and exemplified in the Gospel of Jesus, it is certainly a most laudable design, and absolutely necessary to the establishing His Kingdom in the world, to inculcate those Personal and Social Duties, which he hath laid so great a stress upon, and which make up so eminent a branch of his Religion. It is consequently very laudable and necessary to set to view the Beauties and Benefits of Virtue, which still advances the honour of the Instituter, promotes the love, and facilitates the practice of it in the Disciple. ---- But may we not ask, Have not Christians been unwarily betray'd into a Partiality for Virtue to the Prejudice of Piety; so confining their own and others thoughts to the former, till the latter hath by many been thought needless or forgotten? And hath not this propagated another extrem, a contempt of Virtue, a treating it in terms of great Diminution, under a pretence of raising the credit of Piety by that means? But why must they be thus separated and even set at variance!

variance ! There is an established connection, no less than a Divine one ; a Connection, not from arbitrary will, but a wise and kind adjustment of things, agreeable to the Nature of God, the Nature of Man, to the several relations in which he stands to the Beings about him, and to the qualifications necessary to his real happiness, constituted as he is by his Maker.

For the necessity of Piety to compleat the Christian character, we need only appeal to the Christian Scheme ; and for the expediency of it towards a virtuous disposition and practice, I am ready to believe it established in the following discourse. Every one must see, that it is one thing what a particular person or two in an age finds sufficient as a Principle of Virtue, and another thing quite, what Mankind in general need to influence to a Virtuous conduct, or what is calculated to promote a General Reformation. If this obvious Remark had been attended to, and applied to several of the late Refinements upon the Gospel method of Government, the force and beauty of them had soon vanished.

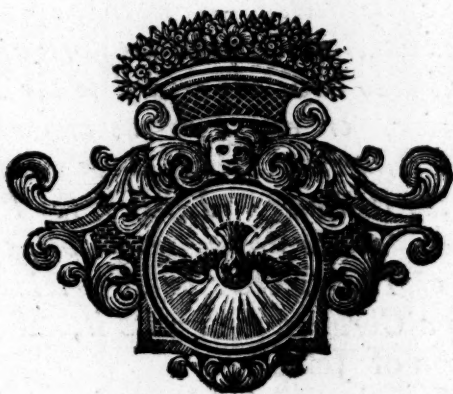
I desire the Religious Society to which I stand related to look on this discourse as an affectionate attempt to preserve them from a pernicious extream, and to advance both Piety and Virtue amongst them. This way would I discharge those special Obligations I am under to them, and should account it one of the most happy passages of my life, if I were but successful. 'Tis from a concern for the honour of Christianity, and a solicitude for their experiencing the present delightful impressions, and the blissful consequences of their profession of it, that I would press them to look to it ----- That their Devotion be solid and rational : such a one as can plead Divine prescription

prescription for its several acts and exercises, is accompanied with the understanding, and with a through engagement of the mind. ----- I would also beg them not to Rest in any delightful impressions experienced amidst such Acts of Devotion, as sufficient to establish a Pious Character; look more to the influence it hath upon your general Walk, and your habitual Frame. Judge of your attention on the Religion of the means by the effects it hath on the Religion of the end. Do your devotional acts dispose your minds to further acts of the same kind, to all the prescribed duties and services of Religion, and promote an esteem of God and regard to him in the whole of your behaviour? Do they advance the several graces that adorn the Christian's heart and life; such as the realizing persuasion of an invisible world; the ascendancy of reason over appetite; courage and resolution to hold on your way thro' all discouragements; the conquest of sinful passions, and the government of the more innocent affections; an extensive catholick charity; in a word, all the branches of Righteousness and Goodness? By a life thus uniformly Pious and Virtuous, our particular acts of Devotion are in the best manner attested to be performed as they ought, and may most confidently be depended on as accepted of God: hereby also our own Piety and Devotion at least will be secured from that slander, under which all pretensions thereto are sometimes unreasonably brought from the inconsistencies of some professing it, That it is an expedient for the better accomplishment of mean and vile designs. ----- Since Mode and Fashion have evidently too much usurped the Government of Religion as well as other things, I would beg leave to warn them also against
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all deference or regard thereto, however prevailing it may become. I cannot for my life see, what Fashion or Custom hath to do with Religion. There is quite a solæcism in the Terms, a Fashionable Religion. The Religion of Christians is unchangeably settled by their Master, nor can any Authorities or Customs on earth dispense with any article thereof, or bear us out before our Judge in following them. Refinements here are downright Deformities: there can be no polishing dispensations but at the expence of its beauty and usefulness, nor a falling in therewith but to our evident hazard as to an hereafter as well as to our present loss. For men to take and leave, to put in or put out at pleasure; to model by inclination or interest, or under a pretence of rendring Religion more palatable to the Disaffected, ---- let it be backed by any thing termed Sanction, merits the scorn and abhorrence of all who have any regard to the Author of their Religion, or any generous aim at the perfecting their Natures, which is the generous scope and end of the Instituter. Let it be the Religion of the Ingenious, of the Polite, or of those who usurp the name of Fine-thinkers or Free-thinkers. ---- What hath a Christian to do with it, if it be not the Religion of Jesus.

It hath been the delightful experience of all qualified Judges, That the natural and generous Ambition of a future Immortality is a most powerful incentive to a progressive Piety and Virtue: as also, That this Piety and Virtue as it advances hath a proportionable influence on that Ambition. Ob! might I be heard in a Prayer for the World! with the warmest heart could I put up the same for all my fellow-creatures, that I now do for the Religious Society I stand related to. May they be able
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to join their testimony, That by a growing Piety and Virtue they enjoy a refreshing presage of an happy Immortality, and that from hence they feel a powerful and steady excitement to fresh advances in Piety and Virtue. Thus adorning their profession, flourishing in every thing divinely Great and Good, and qualified for the most useful and comfortable life, may they in the best sense enjoy themselves, and contribute to the happiness of the World: their Religion and their Comfort too resembling the splendor of the Sun, increasing in strength and influence till it shall be Perfect Day.



ERRATUM: page 17, line 2, *dele* we say.



2 COR. VII. I.

--- *Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

THE Perfection of the Christian Rule hath frequently been made an Objection against it. Some have from hence taken occasion to represent it to themselves and others as a Measure of Duty entirely unsuitable to Mankind in their present impaired circumstances, and carrying such a severity in it, accompanied with its sanctions, as can never be reconciled with the Wisdom and Love of God. This makes them look upon a life governed thereby only as a fine speculation, but from the impracticableness of the thing, no matter of Obligation. But upon due reflection probably this objection, with the conclusions drawn from it, will appear resolvable into pure ignorance of Christianity, or into a disaffection to the practice it enjoins. For, the Perfection of the Rule is *in itself* a good Argument of its Divine Original; and as it is calculated for the Perfection of our Nature, 'tis also an evidence of the Love and Kindness of God to Men: since

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it is demonstrable, that by how much the nearer we approach to the rectitude of the First Being, so much the more must we share in his Blessedness. The objected impracticableness of coming up to the Christian Rule is a poor evasion. If it means, that Human Nature under its present disadvantages will certainly fall short of that *degree* of Holiness which the Precepts carry in them; *this is true*: but then it is no just impeachment of the Gospel as a Rule of Life, since the Perfection of the Rule hath naturally a considerable influence on the perfection of the Copy; and because our final acceptance with God and happiness in him may be obtained by a lower degree, provided there be no *indulgence* to any thing forbidden, but on the contrary, a sincere endeavour to come as near to the Rule as we can. Nor is there any more reason in the Objection of *Severity*: this is partly obviated already; and will, we apprehend, be fully so if it be considered, that with the Rectitude required as the End of the Precept, there are also most apt means provided for the attainment of it. Amongst others, we have the most forcible motives and arguments to influence our minds, leading us to the due use of our thoughts as to the reasonableness, the importance, and advantages of the Duties prescribed; and animating us to an Ambition both of approving our selves therein to God, and reflecting, in the best manner we are able, Perfections which have the most apparent influence upon our own Happiness. Such objections then are plainly resolvable into our not taking things in the connection wherein they stand, and our not considering Christianity as our Saviour hath left it: they
 proceed

proceed from our not joining the Precept with its Motives; from our not taking the Grace and Mercy of the Gospel along with its Strictness; and finally, from our not reflecting, that the several branches of Duty both in their nature and design, are greatly subservient to and influential upon each other.

It is this *latter* point I have my eye upon at present, led to it, as I think, by the Text. We will not be persuaded to take the several branches of Duty together, and Unite them in our practical regards: in consequence of which, we must not only be grossly defective in our Religion, but find it much more difficult and uncomfortable than otherwise we should do. In what sense I understand the words, and whether I have taken their real meaning, will best be seen after I have a little explained the terms. In order to which let it be observed ---- Tho' there was a Christian Church at *Corinth*, there were many who still retained their Heathenish practices of Idolatry and Sensuality. The *Corinthians* seem to have been infamous for two things; for Luxury and Lasciviousness: both of which greatly endangered their return to Idolatry who had embraced the Christian Faith. Their luxurious appetites inclined them too much to partake of the Idol feasts; and their addictedness to Lewdness, which usually accompanied those feasts, exposed them not a little to the direct worship of Idols. The Apostle hereupon found it necessary to warn those who professed the Christian Faith against all communication in such feasts and rites; backing his advice with this argument, That it was upon their separation from such persons, and their freedom from such

vices, that they stood in the relation of Children to God, and might expect his presence and blessing as a Father: nay, that there was an *indispensable* necessity of such a separation in order to entitle and qualify for such privileges. The *Filthiness of the flesh* which the Apostle mentions, most certainly relates to those sensualities, defilements and abuses of the body that were wont to accompany Idolatry; probably here more particularly meant by the *filthiness of the spirit*. The *Holiness* then which stands opposed thereto must at least include what we usually mean by a *Virtuous mind and behaviour*. It will not then be foreign to the Apostle's general design, to consider it as standing *for Virtue in general*, or *those duties that respect ourselves and others*. For the acquisition of this virtuous disposition and behaviour, the means proposed by the Apostle is, The Fear of God, or a pious disposition and life. From whence we may draw this Proposition, *That Piety is the best Principle of Virtue*. Where the mind stands the most strongly and duly disposed *towards God*, there will be the greatest eminency in those duties which respect ourselves and others too.

For the proof of this I would,

I. Give a brief and general account of a pious disposition, here and elsewhere intended by the expression, *The Fear of God*.

II. Consider it in its influences upon the duties that respect ourselves and others.

I. I would endeavour to give a brief account of a pious disposition, here spoken of under the term, *The Fear of God*. This expression then
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strictly taken hath a more immediate respect to Justice in God; as it signifies the determination of his All-perfect Will for the maintaining the Rights of his Government in the punishment of Delinquents and Offenders. The displeasure of a Divine Being, as it is accompanied with an Irresistible Almighty Power, is certainly as proper an object of our Fear, as his Love is of our Hope: the former is equally founded upon the reason of things with the latter: and tho' it may not be the *noblest principle* of Obedience, it is doubtless a very *reasonable motive* to it; answering as truly to the frame of our natures both as Sensitive and Rational, as any other motive can do, upon the supposition that Vice is the object of the Divine abhorrence, and that the Wisdom of the Supreme Governor may lead him to *express* his abhorrence of it: which I think none would deny. Upon the same supposition Christianity is doubtless not only defensible, but testifies the Wisdom of its Author; in that our Fear is addressed to by threatenings, and the Terrors of the Lord are made use of to persuade men by influencing *that* affection; thereby bringing them to consideration, and the use of their rational powers for the avoiding the misery which those Terrors suggest.

But the expression of *The Fear of God*, as it stands here, and is prescribed by the Apostle, is more comprehensive; it seems to me to imply, *A mind deeply and habitually affected with a sense of the duty we owe to God, and disposed to pay him those regards which are suitable to his Excellencies, and the relations in which we stand towards him.* This hath all in it that The Fear
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of God *strictly taken* hath; but it takes in more as its *Object*, even the several Attributes of the Deity; and as to its *Exercise* too, even the practical payment of all proper regards to him as God, at all times, and upon all occasions. If we attend to our own Make, we shall find that our Affections are not at the command of our Wills: we cannot Fear or Love any thing *at pleasure*; but our Minds must discern some qualities and perfections in the Object, something we at least account a perfection, before those affections of the Mind can be excited. Agreeably to this, God hath given us an account of his own Excellencies, all adorable and lovely: he hath given us an account of the Relations in which he stands to us, and we to him; the nearest, the fullest of Obligation that can possibly be. These are set before us to form our Minds to that temper and those regards towards him, which he hath made the matter of an express Command: plainly designing hereby, that our Religion should not be merely mechanical or accidental, but that we should be able to give *ourselves a reason* for our regards of himself; even such reasons as *always* holding, may render our Religion a *Principle*, and our regards to him a *Temper*, a *Business*, a *Life*. And such reasons are we furnish'd with for *that* Fear of God here prescribed in order to our purification from Vice, and perfection in Virtue, viz. *An habitual esteem and regard of him, answering to the Excellencies of his Nature, and the Relations subsisting unchangeably between him and us*. This we stile a *pious disposition*; this the Apostle proposes as a most effectual means towards an eminency in Virtue, or in personal and social Duties. Which brings us

II. To

II. To consider the influence that this Piety hath upon the duties that respect ourselves and others. And

I. Piety hath a *natural* influence upon Virtue. Such is the perfection of the Christian Rule, that there is no branch of Virtue but is the matter of a precept. It is a Scheme of the purest and most exalted Morality that was ever put together: it insists upon virtuous intentions and affections, as well as external actions, and extends to what is hidden in the heart, as well as to what is obvious to the world. So that it is not sufficient to establish a virtuous Character according to the Gospel standard *merely* to abstain from those things which a vitious Mind would suggest and prompt to, but the *Mind itself* should in some good degree be freed from its vitious turn and disposition. The precept extends to *that*: and whilst a person carries about him his envy, malice, revenge, or any other corrupt affection *in any considerable power*, he is an Offender; he doth not come up to the precept, tho' the affections themselves should not always appear to the world. Now since so perfect a Virtue is enjoined us as the Will of God, and is the matter of a precept, a pious disposition must greatly subserve it; since that is in its very nature, an inward regard to the Divine Authority and Approbation. From hence Virtue must naturally spring from true Piety: I say *true* Piety; for there is a Piety falsely so called. There may be acts carrying the appearance of homage and worship to God, without any temper of mind to answer them; that is, without Piety: as we are assured there may be giving all
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our Goods to feed the Poor, where there is no Charity. And by the way, this without breach of Charity may be deemed the case, when those acts are accompanied with *habitual Unrighteousness* of any kind: they are then plainly resolvable into nothing better than a Commutation with Almighty God, or a fine Gloss for the deception of the world: a sense of God hath no concern therein as a Principle, Motive, or End: so far from it, that would the omission of those acts of homage, or their contrary, serve the same purposes, they would be neglected or reversed. On the other hand, where true Piety hath formed the temper, we say Virtue will naturally result from thence: wherever there is a due disposition towards God, and in proportion to it, Sobriety, Righteousness, Charity, Meekness, with every other moral Virtue of course becomes an object of regard, as *they* have the stamp of divine authority upon them, and are the terms of the divine approbation. Again: Piety hath a *natural* influence upon Virtue, or upon a right behaviour towards ourselves and others, as it suggests the most powerful reasons and motives too for such a behaviour. These are the Divine Perfections and Relations to us. No one can be unwillingly ignorant how considerable a branch of the Christian System Virtue makes, how considerable a part of the Divine Will. Now Piety not only composes the mind to a thoughtfulness concerning Duty, but furnishes with constant reasons for it, and disposes the mind to attend to them. If we are habitually disposed to pay all proper regards to God, and have suitable affections *towards him*, he will be habitually present to the mind in his Perfections and

and Relations, and thereby enforce every duty of the second table, as occasion and opportunity offers. The Soul of this pious turn is accustomed to converse with him as the Author of its being, the Proprietor of its faculties and powers, and the Object of its absolute dependance: as its rightful Sovereign, omniscient Witness, and Arbitrator of its state both here and hereafter, from whom there is no appeal: as its kind Benefactor from whom all it possesses, in the vast variety of it, hath proceeded; of whom it holds All; and from whom the Happiness, ultimate and compleat, which it expects, must be derived to it, or it is undone for ever. This keeps awake its natural sense of *Justice*, which leads it to employ all its faculties and talents under a Divine direction: it sets a perfect and universal observance of God's Will in the light of *Gratitude*; and prompts to the pleasing and honouring this its Maker and Benefactor, as the very best sacrifice it can offer. Such reasons may not always be drawn out *in form* and *actual thought* for the service of Virtue, but this *habitual* influence is steadily found. They give a general turn and tendency to the behaviour, and are ready for use under any fallacy of inclination, or proposed temptation to any instance of Vice.

2. Piety hath not only a natural, but, compared with some other motives, a *peculiar* influence upon the duties respecting our selves and others. Some have talked, and more by their practice declare their sentiments are, That Morality might be well enough secured without that disposition respecting God, which Piety includes. Piety and Virtue are so separable

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with them, that the latter may be sufficiently maintained without the former. I think this is not true; nay, that it is a *very pernicious* mistake. It seems very contrary to the *natural* sentiments of Mankind, where they have been *thinking* persons. One Heathen of considerable note* declares, *That Piety is at the head of every Virtue.* Another,† who with most in that sentiment is a greater authority than Jesus Christ, saith, *That if Piety towards God were taken away, Fidelity and Justice amongst Men would not long survive.* When *Abimelech* the King of *Gerar* expostulated with *Abraham* for concealing from him that *Sarah* was his wife, whereby he laid a very great snare in his way; *Abraham* gives him this reason for it, || *Because I thought the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife's sake.* His reasoning was plainly this; that where there was no regard to God, it was very unlikely there should be any restraint from acts of cruelty and injustice, when prompted to them by a strong inclination, and when opportunity favoured a present gratification: with this reasoning *Abimelech* himself seems satisfied. We dont say, but some from good natural dispositions may do some virtuous acts: but we must also know, if we are acquainted as we ought with our Rule, that persons are denominated *Virtuous* from the *prevalency* of a behaviour and practice; for which we apprehend a pious Disposition is absolutely necessary. But it may be asked, Are there not some other things that will equally subserve and maintain Virtue, and prove as sufficient Principles as Piety? Such as a principle of Honour; a Love of

* Hierocles.

† Cicero.

|| Gen. xx. 11.

of Virtue itself; a regard to our own present interest which Virtue undeniably befriends. Will not these be as effectual to the supporting a steady course of Virtue? I answer, No. Let us a little consider the strength and power of these things as influential upon a virtuous life.

Some may think that a *sense of honour*, without any thing else, is sufficient to produce and support a truly virtuous life. ----- Without all doubt, Virtue is truly honourable: it is so from its own intrinsic excellency; as also in a relative view, as it is most agreeable to the dignity of the human nature. It gives a person a most just title to an universal respect so far as he is known: insomuch that Temperance, Chastity, Justice, Liberality, Gratitude, are applauded even by those who won't copy them. But, how few amongst Mankind have any sense of Honour at all? How many who are acquainted with, who can feel; no higher sense, than *that of Agreeable or Disagreeable to Inclination!* Such undoubtedly cannot be influenced by this sense of Honour. As for those who have it, and are in any measure influenced by it----they find it a very *precarious* principle. Every one knows how great an influence *fashion and common vogue* have upon our sentiments of things as *honourable or mean*; and what powerful seducers they are. Our senses sufficiently inform us, that many things, which even upon a slender examination are evidently base and dishonourable, are disguised and recommended to the generality from a gallantry and bravery which Custom or Fashion only hath stamp'd upon them. Tho' this doth not alter the nature of things, yet it greatly influences our apprehensions of them. It may

and doth corrupt insensibly our sense of Honour, and thereby may as well lead us *from* Virtue, as *to* it. Nay further, tho' we allow that some, who have little or no regard to God, may at present act a virtuous part for the *very Honour of being virtuous*, yet what *Security* doth this principle contain? That very Honour thus strongly affected, and which is in this case the same with *Reputation*, may very easily and suddenly come to be preferred to Virtue itself: it is but for Honour and Virtue to be divided; and this may be by the next set of acquaintance that their civil interests, or some particular taste may throw them amongst. *Then* probably this fine Epithet of Honourable is translated to a very foul thing, and the bias to Virtue becomes a bias to Vice. *Honour* as accompanying Virtue is likely to influence *only* when Virtue is generally reputable, that is, fashionable: it is much too feeble a thing to enable a person to withstand the reproaches, sneers, contempt, and all the other marks of Dishonour, which, when unfashionable, it bears. In short, Honour as a principle of a virtuous *life* may serve for a Topick to harangue upon; but when persons are virtuous only for the Honour of being so, it will be found to fall as short of Piety in its effects, as the Honour that comes from Men is inferior in its influence to the Honour that comes from God.

Others propose the *Love of Virtue* as a sufficient principle of a *life* of Virtue; thus setting aside Piety as necessary thereto. But *this* also we believe upon examination will be found a delusive phrase, or else very insufficient to answer the end proposed.---We have already allowed an intrinsic Excellency in Virtue: it hath an *essential*

sential beauty, and may captivate any one as far as admiration goes, who will but steadily behold it. But; if by a *Love* of Virtue be meant no more than an *Admiration of it as a lovely thing in itself*-----this is equally the acknowledgment of the *Worst* with the *Best*. When *they* are calm enough for thought, and free enough to declare their real sentiments, they are constrained in spite of themselves to bear a testimony to this truth.* So that this sentiment of Virtue is what many have, who yet think not fit to embrace it. Further; if by a *Love* of Virtue be meant a *Pleasure in the Acts of it*, we acknowledge this is much more than the former: and doubtless, where the virtuous principle hath so far gained the heart, that a *delight* is taken in virtuous actions, much may be expected towards a virtuous *Life*. But this naturally brings on a *Question*; *How is this delight in Virtue to be obtained?* I fear it is the case of very few. Those who are strangers or enemies to Virtue, or those who are just enter'd upon a virtuous course, can know but very little of the matter. What principle are *they* to act upon, to whom this Delight in Virtue cannot be a principle? or how shall *they* attain to this *delight* in virtuous acts? If it be said, *By the practice of it*; the *Question* still returns, *How shall they be engaged to this practice which is to secure this love?* For my own part, I can discern no solid answer hereto, but, *A regard to God*. If this be so, Piety must still be acknowledged the best principle of Virtue.----But, to allow as much

* Illud enim honestum, quod sæpe diximus, etiamsi in alio cernimus, tamen nos movet, atque illi, in quo id inesse videtur, amicos facit. *Cic. de Off. L. 1.*

much as can well be supposed, That there is an actual delight found by some in virtuous acts, even where there is little or no regard to God: yet let it be enquired, Whether this pleasure and love is not confined to some *particular* Virtues to which natural Constitution may lead,* or which a prudent and good Education may have render'd habitual. I dare to say, *it is not a love to Virtue in general*. If so, this partial Virtue is not sufficient for the Divine approbation, or to secure a character with God, whatever it may do towards a name and character amongst Men. We cannot think that any person is constitutionally disposed towards *every* Virtue; nay most certainly, every one hath his constitutional *Vices* as well as Virtues. The Question then still remains to be answer'd; How shall we attain the love of *those* Virtues that are opposite to *those* Vices? Or how can a person be denominated *virtuous* from the delight in *some* Virtues, whilst he abhors and lives in opposition to others? This love then cannot be *general* but by means of some principle; and this principle must *equally* affect and influence every branch of Virtue: And what hath sufficient power or is thus *extensively* influencing, besides a regard to God? Give me leave to add, If there be a Love of Virtue in any separate from Piety, there is also a love

* As for Virtues distinguished ordinarily by their being Constitutional, they seem more allied to the Animal than the Rational part of our Natures: and tho' they render the possessors in some degree more happy in themselves, more agreeable or useful to others than otherwise they sometimes would be, yet in themselves they constitute not a virtuous character, tho' they may befriend it: they are rather amiable *instincts* than virtues, whilst reason and reflection have no concern in their operation or direction.

a love of other things inwrought and natural, which are Counter-affections, which consequently will combat this love of Virtue. Now supposing Virtue hath no other security than merely the pleasure we take in some acts of it, how likely is it that we shall embrace favourable opportunities for the gratifying of a Counter-affection when attended with soliciting circumstances? since in this case it will appear to be only preferring one pleasure to another, a greater to a less, which a person who hath no religious view or principle will too readily think himself at liberty to do. If we are virtuous *only because we like to be so*, I am sure in our present circumstances we are in great danger of being virtuous *no farther than we like to be so*. For, in truth, *Inclination* is here the principle. To add no more: Upon every such prevalency of a vitious affection, the virtuous one considerably abates: it is impaired as to influence and government, and in the way to be none at all.

Others propose *the present advantages naturally resulting* from Virtue as a sufficient principle of a virtuous *life*, without the aid of Piety or a regard to God. But upon serious enquiry I believe *this* will be found no better than the former expedients.---Man is a Sensitive Being, as well as Rational: and our Great Former hath so ordered our nature with respect to *Moral* Good and Evil as well as *Natural*, that we should *feel* the present advantages and benefits of Virtue, as an engagement to our prosecution of it: inso-much that we have undeniable experience, that upon the whole a virtuous course is vastly preferable to a vitious one, with respect to the interests of the present life. Virtue is so much
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the Health of the Mind and Body, it is so much at the foundation of the enjoyment and comfort of the present state, that if we looked no farther, there is enough to ascertain its pre-eminence to Vice; and, so far as Reason governs, to determine our preference. But, if this be the *whole* of that principle which is to secure a virtuous life, I doubt it will soon be found unequal to the task. The reasons are these-----Tho' Virtue is indisputably subservient in its nature to our present happiness, yet we know it is far from prevailing universally: hereupon, the vices of others may in many cases deprive those who are virtuous of some at least of the *natural* advantages of their Virtue, and take occasion from their Virtue to prejudice their temporal interests. In this case, which is a common one, the principle of *present advantage* greatly fails: Virtue doth not secure and befriend as it was expected to do. What then is most likely to follow? Surely this: That the *actual* and *sensible* evils, to which thro' the vices of others Virtue hath exposed and subjected them, prove their deserting of Virtue, rather than that the *meer notion* of its natural advantages, contradicted too by their experience, should maintain the practice of it.----If it be said, Let what advantages soever be taken of Virtue by the Vitious, that yet the Virtuous have still a *consciousness of having acted a virtuous part*, which weighs down all their disappointments---Not to say, that such a *satisfaction* from an inward consciousness seems peculiar to those who have attained to an *habit* of virtuous action, whose number 'tis to be feared is not very considerable; but what can it do for those *who feel nothing*

nothing of this grateful consciousness?----Not to insist upon this we say, we would ask; what Satisfaction can be found from *this Consciousness* to support under great disappointments, *but* as it is connected with a regard to the divine approbation, and a pledge thereof? Can the *meer Judgment* that the Mind passes upon the action as right and good, *without taking in any thing more*, secure a perseverance in a course of Virtue under considerable losses and disappointments, sustained by an adherence to it? We must be other creatures than we are, I think, before this can be. On the other hand, let us but call Piety in to our aid here, a regard to the Authority and Approbation of God, as our Governor, Inspector, and Rewarder, *then* we can easily see how such a Consciousness of acting right should yield a satisfaction for the maintenance of Virtue, however some of its natural advantages may be intercepted. I beg leave to add farther, The natural advantages of Virtue are not *of themselves* a sufficient principle of a virtuous Life, because persons whose behaviour is resolvable wholly into *secular advantages*, may by direction so manage, as to preserve their estates, their bodily constitution, their good name tolerably well, whilst they are in the Gospel account, and in the Judgment of Reason too, really Vicious. This principle, or the knowledge they have of *Virtue's subserving our present interest and happiness*, may of itself be sufficient to preserve them from those vices, which more immediately disturb *that* happiness, and prejudice *that* interest; but it will also, I fear, admit of many that are inconsistent with the *future* happiness the Gospel proposes. If

there is no better principle than this, what should preserve from those vices, which by management they can prevent damaging their health, estate, or reputation, or which by discretion they can follow consistently with their present Ease and Peace? Of this sort there are several. It's undeniable; *this* is a principle of worldly wisdom: The Virtue that is practised from its influence, is wholly measured by it, and is likely to go no farther than what appears necessary for *secular* ends; which can never establish a virtuous Character. For, it leaves persons free to many Vices, at least of the Mind, which will destroy their Virtue in the divine account. We might also add; that when Virtue hath no better a principle than its own *present advantages*, it must be very uncertain, whether such a one shall act virtuously or vitiously: For, adhering to Virtue *purely* from its influence on our *temporal* happiness, we are most likely to follow its contrary, where that *appears more* subservient thereto; as in many particular cases it is known to do. To sum up all: Tho' Virtue undeniably befriends a present happiness, yet where persons are influenced by no higher principle than that of its *natural advantages*, they will certainly be very defective in Virtue. For, as to the Obligation to follow it, there is properly none in this principle: it appearing to me evidently to carry this in it, That if such were willing to forego their own present interest, they would be accountable to none but themselves. This very principle is consistent with much filthiness of the Spirit, or with many Vices of the Mind, and may lead *from* Virtue, as well as *to* it. Since in many
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Instances, according to the state of the world, profit, pleasure, safety, reputation *appear more* effectually secured by Vice than Virtue. A regard to God, upon the whole, seems absolutely requisite for the producing and maintaining of a virtuous Life, in order to secure and aid every other principle that may befriend it.

I have not said any thing with a Design to deprectate any of these principles, since they may in their measure befriend Virtue, and strengthen its interest: let them avail thereto so far as they can, and so far let them be esteemed. Our aim hath been to represent that as the *first* principle of Virtue which we believe is First, which hath the Chief power and efficacy towards a virtuous life and character. I hope it appears evident, That let us take what principles we will for that end, they will be found insufficient; that is, Virtue would be very imperfect as to any, it would languish and expire as to the most, without that of Piety, or the Fear of God. If a regard to our Maker is not as it were the first Impulse, some mean and sordid principle is like to leaven our Actions, or some vile one pervert them. Whilst there is a sufficient *worth* in Virtue to *deserve* our choice, it hath not a sufficient *power* in itself to engage our choice. I shall now briefly shew what *peculiar* and *special* influence Piety, or an inward regard to God, hath upon Virtue, or upon a right behaviour towards ourselves and others.

1. This and this *only* will have an universal Influence. We have already hinted how perfect and compleat the Christian System of Virtue is: there is every thing that is true, honourable,

ble, just, pure, lovely and of good report included in it, and inculcated by it. Other principles may sway in some particular instances, but This only we apprehend will lead us to account *all* the precepts of Virtue to be right, and extend its obligation *to all*. That regard to the Divine Authority and Approbation it includes, that regard to the Divine Eye which it supposes, will not admit of an exception to any known branch of Virtue; but is the strongest engagement that can be thought of to All, and equally so to Each. Where *this* prevails, the vices that are *consistent* with our worldly interest, reputation, or health, will be startled at, as well as those that *threaten* them All: such differences between one and another will be no encouragement to practice; they will have no influence upon such a mind; because it hath one standing over-ruling Argument equally levelled against All, *viz.* That they contract guilt, are offensive to God, and risque his favour. By this also all Virtues have equally one powerful Sanction; since they are enjoined by the same Authority; and this very Authority the pious Soul is governed by. Take any other principle, as far as I can see into the matter, and a person must be at great uncertainties with himself, whether he shall do well or ill. Regards to Virtue must be partial and accidental, except they are founded upon a principle, whose influence is as extensive as itself. Such a principle is the Fear of God where it is in reality: it is a source of universal Goodness. As the divine Precept takes in every instance of right behaviour towards ourselves and others, so the divine Sanction reaches to *all*,
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and consequently contains more of Argument or Diffuasive than any other that can be suggested.

2. This and this principle only can equal and answer the temptations that lie in the way of Virtue. The temporal interests of Men very frequently clash; and so prevalent is a base Selfishness, that many think themselves real losers by what others enjoy. Whenever therefore Power and Opportunity are united, it is a very trying inducement to injure and oppress; at least to revenge injuries; especially when a person knows he is skreened from all impeachment, can gratify his malice under a specious pretext, or so as to avoid discovery and censure. We have an instance of the peculiar influence of Piety under the greatest provocation to, and the most favourable circumstances for the executing Revenge, in the case of *Joseph* and his Brethren. He had been treated barbarously by them thro' Envy: he had now no Superior in *Egypt*, where they were, but the King himself, and was as high in his favour, as in advancement: he knew his brethren, and they did not know him; he remember'd their cruel treatment of him; and under these circumstances could have gratified any resentments in the world, under the pretence of their being Spies, and by dint of that power he was invested with. What was their Security against the evils they apprehended *not*, but the same he gives them against those they *did* apprehend, *viz.* His Fear of God? * This suppressed his Revenge, and was their security for receiving Good for Evil. What principle besides this can

* Gen. xlii. 18.

can balance the trial of *Secrecy*, when on the side of strong inclination? When a person may gratify an unclean or an unjust passion, and it may ever remain concealed from the world? 'Tis reasonable to suppose every other principle but Piety would have soon yielded to a temptation so circumstanced as *Joseph's* was; wherein there were repeated sollicitations, a prospect of interest upon the easy terms of indulging inclination, the danger of feeling very warm resentments in case of refusal; and all this enforced by the circumstance of all the secrecy that could be wished. But, an habitual regard to an invisible God enabled him to act a most heroick part.* From thence none of those powerful things moved him. Might we not also instance in those particular Virtues that are unfashionable, that have prevailing custom, and consequently prevailing scorn and reproach against them; or those which, if not dispensed with in time and place, would prove the losing a most favourable opportunity for the raising ourselves and families?----In these cases, I doubt there is nothing but the Fear of God that would keep us steady to Virtue; or enable us to adhere to it under our cooling discouragements, or the more ensnaring bribes for our relinquishing it, which abound in the World. But, *this* is calculated for every case, for every trial, for every circumstance; Secrecy itself not excepted; and thereupon may every where, and at all times, be the guard and support of Virtue. It respects an All-seeing Eye and a Judgment Bar, where secret things shall be brought to light, brought to account, and the most perfect

* Gen. xxxix. 9.

fect righteousness administred: from hence it supplies with a constant reason for action and behaviour, a reason most becoming a reasonable creature to be influenced by, and furnishes a reply to every temptation, to every circumstance in it. Further,

3. This and this Principle only is likely to influence the dispositions and affections of the mind, from whence we are principally denominated, and our lives are prevailingly Virtuous or Vitious. Our blessed Lord intending nothing less than an universal goodness of manners, hath given laws to the thoughts of the heart, hath levelled his commands at the temper and disposition of the mind: this I say he hath done in order to secure a truly virtuous behaviour. And indeed a *through* and *steady* Virtue cannot be secured without attending to, and guarding the thoughts and affections of the heart.* We know they who *indulge* to *vitious affections* are in the language of the Gospel *vitious persons*. A malicious, revengeful, unjust, or unclean *disposition*, when it prevails, denominates in the sight of God,|| and will probably sooner or later betray itself to the world by actions of the same kind. If there then be a due regard to God, it will extend to these: it will purify the heart; it will subdue and mortify the vitious affections; it will correct the inward faults, so far as we are conscious of them, and renew us in the Spirit of our minds, and thus cleanse us from the filthiness of the Spirit, as well as of the flesh. On the other hand, what besides itself can go so far? What besides is adapted to reach what

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* Prov. iv. 23.

|| Mat. v. 22, 28.

is hidden and concealed from the world? This doth not only *stifle* or *suppress* inordinate inclinations, or vicious dispositions for the present, but gives us the *Government of them*, and is adapted to *cure* them by inspiring better. In a word, whilst other things go but little beyond complection, out-side, and appearances of Virtue; a Regard to a God that searches the Heart, and hath laid his laws upon the Mind, will engage to look to the heart, to purify the mind, to secure truth and holiness in the inward part: hereby not only the actions in themselves may be virtuous, but the persons virtuous that do them, and this way we may make Heaven of our Virtue.-----I would now assist the Reader in the making some reflections upon what hath been offered, that it may more effectually answer its *practical* design and end. And

1. We may from hence learn what *true* Piety is. Sure it must be owing to some very gross misapprehensions of the thing, that it should be spoke of, as it too often is, in a contemptuous manner. I am far from pleading for every thing that hath gone under the title of Piety. The account that hath been given of it is this, *Such a sense of the existence and perfections of a Divine Being, as disposes us to pay him those regards which are suitable to his Excellencies and the Relations in which he stands to us.* I cannot see any thing in this account of Piety that should disgust the most reasonable mind, or any that *TRULY think freely*; a character I wish could be *justly* claimed by all the world. Such a Piety is so agreeable to the highest reason of Mankind, that were it not under some corrupt

rupt biaſs, and the mind but duely informed, it would naturally reſult from a due conſideration of things. Since all knowledge is the effect of ſome attention, perſons may by a neglect of their faculties overlook the moſt obvious things : the beſt things alſo may be abuſed and brought into contempt, by being employed to give a Sanction to trifles, and to ſhelter abſurdities under their more honourable names : But this ignorance or abuſe is wholly inexcusable, when by means of the Goſpel, things are ſo notorious and plain to all who will make uſe of their underſtandings. Let it be obſerved then, that let our ſenſe or apprehenſions of a Divine Being be what they will, if they are not diſcovered by proper and ſuitable acts, it will never conſtitute a Pious Character. *Abraham* was called out to offer his Son ; which when *in intention* he did, he received that attestation to his piety, *Now I know that thou feareſt or regardeſt me :* * plainly intimating, his diſregard of the divine order had been an incontestable impeachment of his Piety or Fear of God. --- Again, true Piety conſiſts not in a regard of any ſingle Perfection or Relation, to a diſregard of the reſt. It is indeed expreſſed by a Fear of God in the text, which ſtrictly taken answers to nothing but the Divine Power and Juſtice. But this Phraſe is more particularly uſed in Scripture from the leading influence it hath towards an univerſal regard, and as moſt comprehensive of ſuch a one as is due from us. It is grounded immediately upon his ſupream Excellencies and abſolute Dominion ; upon thoſe Relations which beſpeak Authority and right of claim from us ; and therefore is at the

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* Gen. xxii. 12.

foundation of all obedience. But then it should be remembred, it never implies any amazing confounding terror ; such as we have in a storm, or when a sudden calamity seizes us ; not a consternation, dread, or astonishment. It is a calm composed temper ; a veneration for him as most excellent, a reasonable deprecation of his displeasure : this is perfectly consistent with the animating hope of his Mercy, with a confidence in his Goodness and Benevolence. And indeed did not the required Fear of God include, or at least *admit* of Hope and Trust in him, and a Love of him, there could be no *true* Piety ; since there could be no acts expressive of those Relations to us, under which His Son hath particularly recommended him to us, even those of a Father, Friend, and Benefactor. So far is a slavish dread from being a Religious Fear. Nor further, is it a Pious *Humour* only that we have been recommending, the effect of a mechanical or accidental cause, which must be as mutable as its cause : not *Fits* of Devotion appearing at certain seasons of the Year, and then disappearing : No, but a *State of mind* ; a *fixed steady* disposition to please a Supream Being, and to gain his approbation, as the supream reason of our actions, running thro' our whole conversation, and taking place of all other considerations in what we do or forbear, desire or dread. This I think is so worthy an Intention, so just a principle of action for reasonable creatures, that it must always be found in the highest degree where reason is in the greatest perfection amongst them.

2. We may learn the Importance of a Pious disposition. If we were to judge by the practice and conversation of many who profess christianity,

anity, the *whole* of Religion, or of what is incumbent upon us in order to the Divine acceptance, seems confined to the Duties respecting our Fellow-creatures. Benevolence, Gratitude to benefactors, Justice in dealing, a gentle and peaceable disposition towards all, Truth in words, Faithfulness to engagements and promises, &c. These are all they concern themselves with, and lay a stress upon --- To such our Lord's words are very applicable tho' in somewhat a different case ; *These ought ye to have done, but not to leave other things undone.* * These ought not to be slighted or neglected ; but then there is something else which, in a sense, claims our principal and first regard ; *a due Fear of God* ---- This is *eternally unchangeably* right and fit *in itself*. If there be a God, there are certain dispositions of mind absolutely necessary to be found in us towards him, answering to the Perfections of his nature, and the indissoluble Relations between him and us. His Greatness and supream Excellencies demand our veneration ; his All-sufficiency and Faithfulness our trust ; his Wisdom our resignation and submission ; his Goodness our Fear || as well as Hope ; his Bounty

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* Mat. xxiii. 23. || It may probably appear strange to some that Fear should be mentioned as answering to Goodness, which seems to result from a very different Attribute : but the Propriety I apprehend would soon be discerned if we considered Goodness in God as a moral Perfection exercised under the direction of Wisdom ; and not merely as an Instinct, or what we term amongst our selves, Good-Nature. For, such a moral Perfection hath evidently its bounds and limits with respect to its exercise ; it hath a regard to Fitness, and consequently to the qualification of its object ; and hereupon its acts may be suspended, yea, it may require punishment : and when the will of God in communicating blessings is governed by his Wisdom, suffering is more certain to the despisers of his Goodness, than if a more variable passion conducted the divine Acts.

our Gratitude ; and his rightful Supremacy and Dominion our solicitude to govern our selves by his Will and Pleasure in all things. Upon the supposition God possesses these Perfections and Prerogatives, that he has discovered them to us, and we are capable of answering them in this manner, such dispositions towards him are primarily incumbent upon us ; since *his* are the First Relations, the First Claims : and it appears to me an absurdity equal to any, to suppose that such Perfections accompanied with the Divine Relations, may be innocently or safely disregarded by us. I beg leave to repeat it : *Piety towards God is of unchangeable obligation* : and it is astonishing that any should not see it who profess a Veneration for Reason, and to be determined absolutely by the Nature of things -- -- Add to this, That the Gospel makes Godliness, or a suitable disposition of mind towards the Blessed God in particular, an absolutely necessary ingredient in the character of a christian. To this christianity calls us directly as one essential branch of its design ; * of its constitutive form : it is given as a Periphrasis of christianity, *That it is a doctrine according to Godliness*, || or a doctrine calculated and intended to promote Piety : and whatever moralist a person may be, his character as a christian is imperfect if Piety do not accompany his Virtues. ** Agreeable to this as Rational a Writer as ever the world allowed the character to, thus expresses himself : “ A State of Temperance, Sobriety and Justice without Devotion is a cold, lifeless, insipid Condition of Virtue, and is rather to be stiled Philosophy”

* Titus ii. 11. 12. || Tim. i. 6. 3. ** 2 Pet. i. 5, 12.

“ fophy than Religion. ” What hath been suggested I think hath in a good measure pleaded the Necessity and Importance of Piety, as we have shewn the peculiar influence it hath upon Virtue in general: if we would perfect holiness or virtue, it must be thro’ the Fear of God. *This* leads a person to *every* branch of Virtue, which no other principle will do: it will lead us *only* to Virtue; whereas other principles may under circumstances which are very common lead to Vice as well as Virtue. Where there is this prevailing sense of God, and internal Regard to him, there is naturally a fixed persuasion of a witness and spectator in the greatest solitude, whose Eye under such a disposition carries more influence than that of a World. God’s Will is before such, bespeaking the necessity of *every* Virtue, and requiring its Exercise on all proper occasions. From a consciousness of a Divine presence and regard to the Divine approbation, the Soul is kept steady under temptations to vice, is animated to act a virtuous part tho’ no other Eye behold it, yea, tho’ it be reproached for it: it can set aside its fear of Man by its regard to God, and its supream ambition to prove its Fidelity to him. To go still further, from its very principle it can turn the greatness of a temptation to vice into an argument for withstanding it, as such a circumstance is fully beheld by its Omniscient witness, and renders it lovely and precious in his sight, whose judgment is the standard of merit, and whose favour is an everlasting attestation and reward. Scripture plainly points to a *Pious* disposition as distinguishing *Enoch* and *Noah* from others as to the Vices that then prevailed in the world:

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world : they, it is said, *walked with God*, i. e. had a constant regard to him in the course of their lives : their singular Piety was the ground and reason of their singular Virtue : and 'tis as strongly intimated, that the want of Piety was the cause of that total depravation of manners, that inundation of Vice in the old world. And why should not experience be allowed its testimony in this case, whilst there are so many vouchers ready to prove, that where persons have lost their regard to God, they presently make shipwreck of Virtue, or retain but little regard to themselves or their Neighbours. Whatever *single* Virtues remain, they run into *many* Vices, and together with their Piety loose their Morality. When once the awe and reverence of God is gone, there is nothing that I know of sufficient *statedly* to restrain the violence of natural inclination. Methinks therefore those who profess themselves such admirers of Virtue, and are so liberal in its praises, would act but a consistent part to bestow a share upon Piety, which is so peculiar a security to it, and which would contribute to its perfection beyond any thing else. If they are in earnest in their Encomiums on Virtue and in their professed esteem of it, sure this should raise their estimation of Piety ; and the importance they allow to the one, should plead the necessity of the other. It must doubtless be so, if persons would consider and be *determined* by the nature and reason of things : either the nature of Piety or Virtue, the circumstances of Human Nature, or what Reason declares necessary to establish a virtuous character. I am far from depreting *Virtue* by all this ; but only would argue with its professed

essed Admirers upon their own principles in favour of what I think is unreasonably slighted, tho' intrinsically excellent, inducing the strongest obligation, and most eminently serviceable to the uniformity and perfection of Virtue. And that it may be more fully seen whilst I am an advocate for Piety, I am no less so for Virtue, let us consider,

3. We should judge of our Piety or our regard to God, by our Virtue, or our regard to those duties which respect our selves and others. This I think is a natural instruction and conclusion from what hath been offered. If the fear of God is prescribed as the Principle and Security of Holiness, then surely the reality and degree of the principle should be judged of by the reality and degree of its Effects. The Apostle in the text declares, that where there is a true fear of God, it will advance Holiness even to a considerable perfection. We have then all the reason in the world to suspect the sincerity of that Piety, let the pretensions be what they will, which is accompanied with any stated and habitual vices. Attend a little to a solemn declaration and decision of Heaven in this matter --- The Sacrifices amongst the Jews, tho' they received their value *purely from the divine* institution, yet the observing them when instituted was an immediate expression of Piety or a regard to God; because it proceeded from a respect to the divine Command. But in what a variety and pungency of language do we find these very sacrifices detested. * *To what purpose is the multitude of your Sacrifices to me? saith the Lord: who hath required or sought this from your hands*

hands to tread my courts? Cease to offer me your mock, your lying gifts; your incense is an abomination; your solemn assemblies are an iniquity; I cannot bear or endure your stated festivals. What could be the reason of all this? Were not these oblations, incense, and solemn convocations of God's own appointing, as expressions of a regard to him? Yes; but there was no Piety or regard of God accompanying these acts. How did this appear? Why, *their hands were full of blood*; they were chargeable with cruelty, unrighteousness, and oppression: their forms of Piety were accompanied with great immoralities, and from thence were not only not regarded, but rendered detestable. Accordingly, they are commanded to reform in those instances, and to practice the contrary virtues, if they would have their Piety allowed, or their devotional services accepted. Doth not this undeniably assure us, that let our *expressions* of regard to God be what they will, stated allowed immoralities are in the Divine estimate a contradiction thereto, and a defeating their end both as to character and benefit from God. Such particular acts of Devotion are imputable to any mean or sorry principle, rather than to a regard of God, when they are accompanied with any indulged immoralities respecting either ourselves or others. There cannot well be a greater sneer, or a more palpable contradiction as to character, than to say of any, *They are very Devout but Vicious.* If we do then make conscience of acquitting our selves in our duty to God, to which surely we are indispensably obliged, let us I beg judge of the reality of those dispositions, and the goodness of those acts by the influence they have upon

upon personal and relative duties. For instance : Let us judge of our Love to God whom we have not seen, by our love to our Brother whom we have seen :* let us estimate our reverential regard for God by our being just and honest, temperate and chaste under the temptation of secrecy, and when we are secure from the reflections of the world ;|| let it be shewn by the influence it hath on all our actions *as done in his presence* : let us judge of the sincerity of our homage to him, and transactions with him, by our regard to Truth and sincerity amongst men : let us judge of our Gratitude to him for favours innumerable, since we can make *him* no requital, by our beneficence and kindness to our fellow-creatures as we have ability and opportunity ;** and of our regards to his mercy and favour, by our forbearing and forgiving those who have injured us. |||| To sum up all : a truly Pious disposition can never be evidenced to the satisfaction of a well-instructed mind, but by the practice of those virtues towards others, which correspond to the perfections we profess to regard and admire in God, as far as we are capable of an imitation, or the exemplifying it by that Morality it is adapted to produce. Let our pretensions to, or expressions of Piety be what they will, if they promote not our Holiness or Virtue, they are but a solemn shew : 'tis a Religion without Piety ; a Devotion without Veneration or love ; 'tis a Godliness without Goodness. What its acceptance is like then to be with an All-wise God --- we may leave with common sense to determine.

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* 1 John iv. 20. || v. Neh. 16.
15. 16. |||| vi. Mat. 14.

** xiii. Heb.

4. We may also learn the necessity and advantage of cultivating a Pious disposition. If it hath this influence upon Virtue, its influence must be in proportion to its power. The more deeply riveted this Fear of God is, the more steady and universal will our holiness be. This certainly is improveable : if any should ask by what means ; I would reply, by these two ways more especially :

1. By frequent meditations and reflections on a Divine Being. The impressions the mind of Man receives mainly result from the exercises and employments of it : this holds good in respect of the highest matters it hath to converse with : and indeed what is not the object of our Senses can *only* influence as it is presented by Thought. There is nothing more visible than a God in his works and operations to a mind disposed to reflection ; there is nothing less disputable than that our degree of Intelligence was designed for our contemplation of his works, and of himself by them. Oh ! whence is it, that the Effects should terminate the Eye, and even conceal the Cause ! that minds capable of penetrating into much of the Wisdom and Goodness exhibited in the Divine works, should yet *stop* short of the Glorious Subject in which they reside, and when confessedly they can be only His ! One would think, it was much more difficult here to do wrong, than right ; more difficult to rest in the effects, than to rise to the Great Author. Christianity also hath this excellency, that it gives us the most august and amiable Idea of the Deity ; whereby whilst it from thence plainly obliges to contemplation, it is quite *indulgent* to the human Mind ; since the

the most grateful affections of mind are naturally excited upon such a contemplation. But even amidst this additional advantage, how many rest in the general belief hereof, without feeling any disposition answering to the great Truth, or corresponding to a Being of such excellencies, and standing in such Relations! What is so likely to be the cause, as our not conversing with this Being by fixed thought, and designed contemplation? as his not being more frequently before the eye of the mind, and thereby becoming more sensibly present: for in point of influence, He no further exists than as he is the subject of our minds. We are not indeed usually so strongly affected with any thing as what our senses inform us of; yet since our Reason can as fully *satisfy* us of the reality of the Divine Presence, and exhibit God's perfections and relations to the view of the mind, we are as capable of conversing with him as with our fellow-creatures by the exercise of our minds; and of experiencing those affections that agree to his perfections, as we are of being influenced by the shadows of those excellencies in a fellow-creature. However perfect our Idea of God be, however readily allowed, yet if it is not frequently under view, and brought home to our selves; the impression is likely to be very little more than in a state of ignorance or infidelity: its attraction, its obligation cannot be felt: the heart will run loose to every thing the imagination shall send it after, without the least regard to the God above. On the other hand, such perfections and relations filling the mind would insensibly produce answerable dispositions, and, like the seal pressed on the wax, leave an agreeing impression behind them: they are so com-

manding, so concerning, so affecting in themselves and their consequences, that it is scarce supposable the soul should rise from any serious contemplation thereof, without finding itself disposed to every instance of practical regard, as a self-gratification.

2. A due attendance on, and performance of the instrumental duties of Religion : this is a means to promote a Pious disposition. We shall enlarge a little upon two : they are Prayer and the Lord's Supper. ---- Prayer is a branch of natural Religion, and is a natural means of Piety : in that we immediately converse with God in his several perfections and relations ; and if it be performed as it ought with a fixed mind, and with a God in view, it will produce a suitable disposition. It will have an awe, not servile but filial ; kindle a love ; and introduce such a sense of God into the Soul, as to give a general turn and tendency to its thoughts and reflections : the steady practice of it renders this sense most natural and familiar. Prayer is in itself an expression of Piety, and also a means of improving it : nor can I see how any governing sense of a God should be kept up, such a one I mean as is sufficient *statedly* to influence the mind and life, but by this manner of converse ; since there is so much in the world to overlay first principles, to cool and damp our most natural affections, and since second causes so sadly conceal the First. But by such approaches to God the natural sense and apprehension of a Divine Being is enliven'd ; it is as it were a-fresh engraven : when in this way like *Moses* we ascend into the mount with God, we can scarcely descend without deep impressions from the sight, without an improved disposition

position of Soul to regard and venerate the most Glorious Object : and I will beg leave to add, that whatever our present sense of God may be, it will languish as to all practical influences in proportion to the neglecting this branch of Devotion. It is not for his own sake that God hath appointed Prayer ; we can't sure be so stupid as to imagine it ; but for ours : nor for ours *meerly* as a means of supplying lower wants ; but in order to promote those dispositions of mind as are at the foundation of all obedience to himself, and all enjoyment of him. Consequently, tho' it be *in itself* a duty resulting from our relation to God and dependance upon him, its chief excellency lies in its instrumentality to promote the Goodness of the mind and heart ; and no farther doth it constitute a character for Devotion or Godliness with him, than it subserves this its ultimate end. -----

We would also recommend a due regard to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. I know well that some *out of a professed concern for Virtue* have much decried all *positive* institutions, of which this is one. When we consider their abilities for reasoning in general, I think it is not inconsistent with *christian charity*, which, by the way, is the most perfect that can be exercised, to impute their decrying of *all Positive Rites* more to a malignant enmity to Christianity, than any concern for Virtue. Wherein can it be unreasonable to suppose that God should enjoin such Rites ; or how can Morality be prejudiced by such a one as we are speaking of, which carries in its very nature the most direct tendency to promote our regards to it ; and most eminently strengthens moral obligation ?

Surely

Surely did Men really *Think Freely* they would not argue against the Wisdom or Goodness of any thing from *possible abuses*; nor against the reasonableness or propriety of God's requiring some external rites, because Mankind are prone to Superstition. The institution we are speaking of is admirably calculated to promote moral duties: it is a direct *means* for the promoting *Piety*, which I hope is a moral duty, in contradistinction to what is positive, tho' ordinarily distinguished from Morality; and by promoting *that*, as hath been proved, it subserves peculiarly every other duty of a Moral nature. This institution directly leads us to converse with God and the Redeemer, and with the love and regard of both *to us*: what then can more fully impress the mind, or be a stronger engagement to love and regard *from us*? The purity of the Divine Nature, the regards God hath to his own laws and rights are abundantly exhibited in the represented expiation made for Sin; and his compassion to sinners is no less held forth in his admitting the sacrifice, and giving assurance of forgiveness thereupon. Now can we converse with the most awful and amiable representations of the Deity, exhibited in some measure by *sensible* signs, and not find ourselves more disposed to pay the Blessed God his proper regards: those which his perfections and relations to us demand? I wish we were constant to these duties as we might have opportunity, and that there was but a fixed mind with a view to an improving our inward Devotion by them; then, I am persuaded we should find their efficacy considerable. An *habitual piety* is very peculiarly promoted by a frequent

quent and thorough engagement of mind in duties so immediately respecting God : wherein we manifestly trifle and do nothing, if his transforming Perfections and his most affecting acts are not before the mind. Such is the nature of these duties, that they are not reasonable services, or performed agreeably to intelligent Beings, if they are not found influential upon our habitual sense of God and regard to him.

5. We may hence see one great reason of the difficulty of Religion, and whom persons may thank for it. The reason is, persons will separate what God hath joined together. If the several branches of Duty were but *equally* consulted, we should find they were in their nature subservient to each other ; the practice of each would be much facilitated thereby. In a very particular manner would True Piety facilitate the practice of Virtue in all its branches. If we are wholly careless what the temper of our minds is towards God, we must not wonder if we find temptations to intemperance, to injustice, or to the gratifying of any Master-Passion too strong to withstand ; or if we find beneficence, charity, meekness, righteousness or forgiveness very hard to exercise, any further than they are constitutional : for the truth is, they really want a Principle sufficient to influence equally and at all times. I speak it with concern, we are perpetually running into extreams : as some have been and are still extolling Faith, others Devotion ; at the same time depreiating Justice, Benevolence, Charity, Temperance and other personal and relative Virtues, which nothing but downright stupidity can excuse : on the
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the contrary, others no less unreasonably confine their regards to those Virtues; limiting *the all* that the Lord our God hath required of us, to them. This mangling of Religion hath been of the greatest disservice to the world, and will be so: Religion will never prevail, nor appear indeed *itself*, till things are taken as God hath settled them. It is a Maxim with me, that God hath not less consulted Human Nature than his own Supremacy, nor is his Wisdom and Goodness more conspicuous in any thing than *in this connection of things*.

My sincere aim hath been to recommend and revive *true Christianity*. ----- I would fain *recommend* it to such as have not yet thought fit to embrace it, if this should fall into any such hands. They have been often told, and they cannot but know as well as any, that Christianity is a perfect System of Morality; I will venture to say *so perfect*, as to save them all the trouble of Invention to render it *more* compleat. It will not I hope be alledged by any as a charge against it, that it is *too perfect*; for *this*, whether it be confessed or not, is such an objection that no honest or virtuous mind can allow to themselves, nor any wise person think fit to answer when proposed. But as I would look upon them great Friends to Virtue, so it cannot methinks but give them a great pleasure to find such a security to Virtue as Piety, so indispensably required and so strongly pressed by Christianity. This is all in *their way*; and surely merits a *very civil* treatment of it, if it demands not their being greater Apologists for it than they usually are. They fully see, if I mistake not, from what hath been

been said, That Virtue is infinitely obliged to Christianity that hath recommended so useful a Principle, free of every thing superstitious and enslaving, and so peculiarly adapted to remove those general impediments that have kept Virtue at so low an Ebb. But if after this endearing recommendation of Christianity they should be no nearer the becoming Profelytes to it, I hope as an instance of that Justice they so much admire, they will exercise it towards the Christian Rule and its Divine Author: I mean, that when they see the Professors of it depart from their Religion, that they won't charge their inconsistencies upon their Religion. Some good will result from this discourse, if in this respect Christianity may have more Justice done it, than it hath had.

I would desire also to revive true Christianity amongst those who profess it. They might cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against their Religion, by representing it what it is, The most uniform, consistent, amiable thing in the world: but this can never be done but by taking things in the connection the Gospel hath set them in, and allowing them that degree of importance which that hath settled. Don't we know what God the Lord hath required of us, namely, *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with himself.** Is not the *loving the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind the first and great commandment*; and is not the next like to it, *The loving our neighbour as our selves*; and do not these united contain the whole of Religion and Righteousness? || Why should these then ever be separated? Since the

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* vi. Micah, 8.

|| xxii. Mat. 37, 38, 39, 40.

fearing of God and working Righteousness is unchangeably connected, let us not pretend to Piety amidst stated and indulged vices: in so doing we reflect upon the Blessed God, as if he could not see thro' our hypocrisy, or were not Holy enough to hate it; we reflect upon our Blessed Saviour, and stile him the Patron of iniquity: on the other hand, let us not boast of our Virtues, whilst none of our acts are resolvable into a regard of God, nor accompanied with any sense of our Relations and Obligations to him. I think we are yet to learn the Truth as it is in Jesus, if we know not that it requires an Impartial Virtue founded on a sense of Duty to God; and such a sense of our Duty and Obligations to God as is productive of such a Virtue.

Let this then put us upon the enquiry whether we have any principle, or what it is which statedly influences and governs us. Alas! we stand in need of some principle! The mind of Man like a defenceless impotent thing amidst adverse powers will be run away with, unless there be something residing within to strengthen and establish it. If it be not under the influence of a good principle, it will be under the power of some useless or bad one. This should prompt to a more serious enquiry; Have we lived and acted just as it happen'd, and as opportunity and circumstances presented themselves? Much better were it for us to be govern'd by Policy and worldly interest than *wholly* by Inclination, or to act the foolish wanton Libertine: for that would render us less vicious in point of action, tho' it would not render us really more Virtuous in respect of disposition.

tion. But, let us ask again ; have we been under the influence of a Divine Fear, or regard of God ? Sure this ought to take place amongst reasonable creatures, who are under his Government, and are accountable to Him ! There is nothing that will enable us to act, to bear, to deny or forgoe, to advance or persevere, like this. Let us not then be indifferent about this matter ; either foolishly living by Chance or Custom, whereby our slender Goodness, if we have any, can never last, or turn to any account hereafter ; or taking up with any thing as Principle, that will just secure an Appearance of Goodness. Temptations are at hand ; Inclinations are working ; Appetites and Passions yet remain. An *occasional* Religion should not serve, for it will not save us. We have need of something then that will be equal to All our circumstances, duties, and trials : This the Fear of God is, and, I think, nothing else. That will cleanse us from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect our Holiness ; not only to that degree as to render us happy in this world, but to qualify us for the Rewards and Enjoyments of a better ; where this Fear will be so far from being superseded, that it will be perfected as a Source of pleasure, and as a qualification most congenial to Perfect Love, and Perfect Bliss.

Agreeably to the preceeding discourse, I shall beg leave to close with a form of Devotion.

Most Great and Glorious God ! The Supreme Parental Mind ! The Father of Spirits ! who hast given a Spirit to Man, and by thine Inspiration hast conferr'd an Understanding upon him. In that rank of Being thro' thy Goodness

ness I stand: from whence I behold thee conspicuous and amiable in thy Works around me, am capacitated for a Converse with thee; and find thee meeting my first thoughts in thy Perfections and Relations. Towards thee I find my Spirit tending; as Body doth naturally to its Centre: Oh! were it but as steady and with equal strength! I am capable of discerning and acknowledging thee, in some measure suitable to thy Nature, and the claims thou art rightfully making: I would gratefully confess it the Privilege of my nature, and esteem it a standing pledge of thy intending me for a peculiar conduct and felicity. Suffer me not to defeat thy just expectations, or to lose the advantages thou hast designed me thereby: but dispose my mind still more to contemplate thee; Impress it with the most fixed Sentiments of Veneration and Love; and Inspire me with an habitual sense of thee; that by the united influence of Excellency and Obligation I may find my self in a growing Regard of thee and Conformity to thee, may derive a Rectitude in my own Mind from Thine, and may from thence experience every Virtue prevailing in an useful and holy life, and every exercise thereof my Delight and Element. May my apprehensions of thee be most agreeable to thy Nature; my Devotions towards thee be accompanied with fervency and affection; and my sense of thee be testified by an impartial regard to the whole of my Duty: that according to thy free and unmerited promise thro' Jesus, I may be qualified and entitled to that future, happy, state of Existence, where Perfect Piety, Purity, and Charity reign for ever.

F I N I S.